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OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND BUSINESS REGULATION

**DEPARTMENT OF  
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Date: May 16, 2000

To: Telecommunications Service Providers operating in Massachusetts

From: Telecommunications Division

Re: Local Assignment of the 2-1-1 Service Code

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On May 12, 2000, in docket D.T.E. 99-71, the Department of Telecommunications and Energy ("Department") granted the Petition of the Massachusetts Association of Information and Referral Services and the Council of Massachusetts United Ways acting in partnership as the Mass 211 Task Force ("Task Force") for assignment of the 2-1-1 service code as a statewide number for use in connection with the Task Force's network of community and information and referral ("I&R") services across the Commonwealth. The Department's approval of the Petition is subject to the Task Force procuring the necessary funding to implement and operate the proposed 211 program. A copy of the decision is available on the Department's web page at [www.state.ma.us](http://www.state.ma.us).

The Task Force's 211 Program will encompass the entire state of Massachusetts and has the potential to benefit many Massachusetts citizens by increasing awareness of non-emergency, but nevertheless vital, services. The implementation of the Task Force's 211 Program will assist Massachusetts residents needing assistance with problems ranging from health care, substance abuse and family counseling, to emergency food and fuel needs, domestic violence and housing. Under the Task Force's 211 Program, callers will be able to reach an I&R center 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, without the need to remember any agency's name or individual phone number.

To date, the 2-1-1 service code has been assigned for use as a community-service telephone number in Atlanta, Georgia and statewide in Alabama, Connecticut, North Carolina, Texas and Utah. There is also a petition pending before the Federal Communications Commission for 2-1-1 to be designated nationally as a community information and referral number.

In its Order granting the Task Force's petition, the Department concluded that, with the exception of wireless carriers,<sup>1</sup> all other telecommunication service providers ("SPs") in Massachusetts, both incumbent and new market entrants, whether facilities or non-facilities based providers of telephone exchange service, as well as payphone service providers, must participate in the Task Force's statewide 211 Program by routing calls that are dialed using the 2-1-1 service code to the Mass Task Force's I&R service gateway, at no cost to the caller. Accordingly, telecommunication SPs in Massachusetts may not utilize the 2-1-1 service code to provide access to their repair or customer service departments, or use the 2-1-1 service code for any other intrastate purpose other than that designated by this Department.

As noted above, approval of the Petition is subject to the Task Force procuring the necessary funding to implement and operate the proposed 211 program. The Department's Order requires the Task Force to submit a report of its financial status at the time it seeks telecommunication SPs to implement the 2-1-1 service code whereupon the Department will conduct an expedited review of the Task Force's financial readiness. Should the Department approve the Task Force's financial readiness report, the Department will issue a second notice and direct telecommunication SPs including payphone service providers to take the steps necessary to implement the 2-1-1 service code by, for example, reprogramming switch software, so that callers may access the Task Force's I&R services gateway by simply dialing 2-1-1 from any telephone station within Massachusetts. Implementation of the 2-1-1 service code must be complete within six months of Department notification. The Department notes that payphone service providers may need to reprogram, and possibly relabel, their payphone equipment in order to be consistent with the assignment of the 2-1-1 service code to the Task Force. In addition, the Department's Order directs the Task Force, Bell Atlantic - Massachusetts, and all other telecommunication SPs to work cooperatively to efficiently implement the statewide 211 community services information and referral services program in the Commonwealth.

Questions concerning the Task Force's 211 Program and implementation thereof should be directed to Jean Strock, President, 211 Inc., c/o United Way of Central Massachusetts (508) 757-5631. General questions concerning this notice may be directed to Janice McCoy, Analyst in the Telecommunication Division at (617) 305-3745.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to technical feasibility, the Department did not mandate that wireless carriers participate in the 211 program. The Department, however, encourages wireless carriers to continue to explore the technology to enable its customers to access the Task Force's 211 Program.